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Parisians protest 'genocide' of rats as city battles rodent infestation



A Paris city employee shows a dead rat in the Saint Jacques Tower park, in the center of Paris

By David Chazan, Paris
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Thousands of Parisians have signed a petition denouncing efforts to control a rat infestation as a rodent “genocide.”

The French capital is facing its worst rat crisis in decades, and rapid proliferation of the animals has forced several parks to close temporarily amid fears that children could be bitten or infected by disease.

Paris authorities are spending £14 million this year on “deratisation”. But some residents have spoken out in defence of the creatures.

Influenced perhaps by the loveable rat Remy in Disney’s acclaimed 2007 film *Ratatouille*, 25,000 people have signed a petition to stop the “genocide” of the rodents.

Josette Benchetrit, a clinical psychologist who launched the petition at the end of last year, said: “Rat phobia is an unwarranted social phobia, like spider phobia. Give a rat a beautiful bushy tail and you’ve got a squirrel — an animal we love. These poor unfortunates are being mercilessly killed because they’ve been designated by society as scapegoats to be eradicated.”



'Give a rat a beautiful bushy tail and you've got a squirrel'

More than 2,000 comments have been posted online by defenders of the rodents.

“Rats deserve the same consideration as people,” one said.

“Let’s eliminate socialists instead, they’re much more harmful for Paris,” another urged.

A third expressed the hope that the Paris mayor, Anne Hidalgo, will be “erat-icated” in the next elections.

The Green mayor of the capital’s second arrondissement, Jacques Boutault, has joined the pro-rat lobby. “The law stipulates that all animals are living, sentient beings,” he said. “We should be asking ourselves why we need to wipe out rats.”

However, many Parisians are fed up with seeing rats on the streets and say the “deratisation” campaign appears to have had little impact, partly because of EU regulations restricting the use of poison.

New rules ban the sprinkling of anticoagulant pellets to avoid contaminating pets, water supplies or people.

Instead, poison must be placed in small plastic boxes, which pest control workers say is less effective.